DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 330 305 IR 014 919

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TITLE Using Radio To Deliver Teacher Training in West Africa.
PUB DATE 90
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Third World Studies Conference (13th, Omaha, NE, October 5, 1990).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Developing Nations; *Distance Education; *Educational Radio; Elementary Education; *Elementary School Teachers; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; *Inservice Teacher Education; Programing (Broadcast)
IDENTIFIERS *Liberia

ABSTRACT

Three radio stations serving the interior of Liberia, West Africa, were used to broadcast inservice training programs to teachers in grades 1-6. Most of the teachers had not attended college and had received only 5 weeks of preservice training before going into the classroom. Poor roads, a 6-month wet season, and lack of vehicles made face-to-face conferences, common in the United States, impractical. A media unit in the Ministry of Education researched topics, wrote scripts, recorded actualities in schools, narrated the programs, and edited 15-minute tapes before they were broadcast. The radio stations and the primary education program were funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development. Problems with the project included a lack of radio receivers in the schools, broadcast times for programs when teachers were not in their schools, and the fact that the three radio stations did not cover many schools in the populous coastal plain. Future plans to deliver training via radio should anticipate and attempt to solve these problems. Additionally, funding agency officials should be more aware of the local needs and problems that influence the success of such projects. (Author/DB)

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USING RADIO TO DELIVER TEACHER TRAINING IN WEST AFRICA

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(Paper presented at 13th annual Third World Studies Conference, University of Nebraska at Omaha, October 5, 1990.)

Radio was used to deliver training to elementary school teachers in the West African nation of Liberia in 1987 and 1988. The program exemplified boh the promise and problems of using modern technology in Third World countries.

Roads in Liberia's interior often were closed during the six-month wet season, and most teachers did not have personal vehicles. As a result, they had problems getting to administrative headquarters in each of Liberia's 13 counties.

In-country mail often took months, and administrators at t the Ministry of Education, located in Monrovia, the capital, usually lacked operational vehicles. For those which worked, fuel often was short. All these factors made drive-in teacher-training conferences, common in the U. S., impractical or unworkable.

The Liberian Ministry of Education and two projects funded by the U. S. Agency for International Development (USAID) were involved in the use of radio to overcome these problems and to deliver inservice training to elementary school teachers.

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

The Primary Education Program (PEP) was designed to help children in grades 1-6 develop basic skills. The Liberian Rural Communication Network (LRCN) consisted of three radio stations covering 80 percent of the population in the interior, away from the coastal plain containing the country's major cities.

The Primary Education Program was designed to function despite two major problems of government (public) schools: shortages of trained teachers and of textbooks. (The country had a per-capital income of about $500. Most families could not afford textbooks. Many children attended school without them.)

Liberia's two four-year universities graduated only a few of the teachers needed in government schools. As a result, most teachers had at best only a high school education. PEP held five weeks of preservice training each year for new teachers. They studied how to use the instructional booklets and programmed teaching/learning methods built into the project to make up for their lack of training and experience.

In grades 1-3, teachers were told what to say and do in the classroom. There was little or no room for teacher creativity.

USAID consultants and Ministry of Education staff developed a series of booklets in language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies for Grades 1-6. Each covered a small segment of the curriculum, such as agreement of subject and verb in fifth-grade language arts. Despite the programmed

approach, it became apparent that PEP teachers needed more training and that LRCN's radio stations were the only realistic way to deliver it, especially during the wet season.

Three former PEP teachers were trained by the LRCN staff to write and produce radio programs for teacher inservice. They were assisted by a Peace Corps Volunteer and by two members of a Technical Assistance Party provided by USAID. By the end of calendar year 1988, thirty fifteen-minute programs had been researched, written, and recorded. Sixty more programs had been planned and were to be developed when the three writer-producers completed additional training at the LRCN production center near Monrovia.

During 1988, several problems surfaced:

1) LRCN's stations did not cover the coast, Liberia's most populous area. The only station that did was government controlled and had a full schedule of programming.

2) Few teachers had radio receivers in their homes.

3) Because of a short program day, LRCN broadcast the PEP programs when school was not in session.

At the end of 1988, efforts were being made to buy radios for each PEP school and to set aside time in the school day when project teachers could listen to the inservice programs on LRCN, if it would extend its broadcasting day.

At the same time,1988, both PEP and LRCN were faced with possible loss of USAID funding. The Liberian currency was virtually worthless outside the country. Spare parts were scarce, and there were chronic problems maintaining government equipment. The Liberian government was supposed to begin funding both projects, but it was unclear at that time whether both PEP and LRCN would continue.

Any discussion of the future of the Liberian projects must consider the civil war in that country. Its economy was in shambles before the rebel invasion in December, 1989. At least one LRCN station was reported captured. Who will control the country and whether government schools can continue to function are decidedly unclear. Liberia needs not only foreign currency but expertise, such as Peace Corps teachers in government schools and missionaries in non-public schools. All PCVs and many missionaries in 1990 left the country because of fighting. At this writing, the major problem was getting enough food and overcoming problems resulting from a year of destructive tribal warfare.

Regardless of who rules Liberia, reports indicate Liberia's economy, never strong, is unable to feed and care for many citizens. Without massive foreign aid, the future of the projects described in this paper and of the country itself seems bleak.

The author's work in Liberia in 1987 and 1988 was with a media unit in the Ministry of Education which researched teaching materials, wrote scripts, interviewed teachers, recorded actualities in project schools, and edited audio tapes. Unit personnel were former teachers in government schools. Some had helped write the instructional booklets, or modules. Their abilities were mixed, and further training for them was planned by the USAID technical assistance party for the Primary Education Program in 1989.

A major task at the beginning of the author's involvement was identifying the audience for the radio programs. Some programs would switch in midstream from addressing teachers to teaching children. Ultimately, the media unit and a communications consultant identified teacher training as the goal of the radio programs and teachers as the audience for the messages being broadcast.

At the 1988 preservice trainingfor new PEP teachers, many listed topics they wished addressed by radio. Most frequently mentioned was more information on how to teach phonics, the sounds of letters. Fortunately, radio proved an ideal medium for this, and a number of such programs were produced.

All recording and editing of audio tapes was done in the LRCN production center in Paynesville, 15 miles from the Ministry. (Panesville was captured by rebels early in the 1990 invasion. Condition of the facility is unknown.) Transportation to the center for producers from the Ministry of Education

became a major problem. Money for taxis was the best solution until USAID purchased some four-wheel drive vehicles (and hired their drivers). Even after this, the new vehicles often were reserved for administrators; and transportation for the media unit to the production center remained an issue.

As planned, the LRCN stations were to promote national development charging small fees to government agencies and other development groups to broadcast informational programs.

These fees were to help LRCN become partly self-supporting. This plan almost immediately caused problems for the Ministry of Education, which had little money for anything except salaries--and at one time in 1987 was four months behind on those.

Part of the USAID grant for the Primary Education Program had to be used to buy air time, thus shifting aid funds from one USAID project (Primary Education) to another (LRCN).

A number of PEP schools in coastal Monrovia could not be reached by the LRCN stations, designed to serve the interior. At the end of 1988, negotiations were under way in an attempt to buy time for PEP programs on the one government station in Monrovia.

A major problem was that LRCN stations operated only from 6 to 8 a.m. and from 6 to 9 p.m. Government schools were not open at either time. At the end of 1988, Ministry of Education,

LRCN, and USAID officials were negotiating LRCN's signing on at midday to broadcast the Primary Education radio programs.

USAID had budgeted for radios to be purchased for PEP schools. Since many schools had no electricity, receivers had to be battery operated. Unfortunately, USAID had not budgeted for replacement batteries. A similar problem had occurred in an earlier project. Battery-powered tape recorders were purchased, but there was no money for new batteries. The recorders fell into disuse, and most eventually were stolen.

The delivery of inservice by radio, in Liberia and Nepal, combined with the use of radio to teach reading in such countries as Kenya, has generated a body of knowledge worthy of additional study.

Based on the author's experiences in Liberia, funding agencies may wish to reexamine policies which permit the building of expensive capital outlay projects in Third World countries but which do not provide for long-term operation and maintenance. These nations should, on paper at least, be able to take over financial reposonsibility for such programs. Whether many of them can do so is open to question.

Radio seems to be a viable channel for delivering inservice training to teachers in countries where transportation is difficult. If this activity is to be part of foreign aid, planning should begin early. In Liberia, it was an add-on to

both of the USAID projects. Planning should anticipate such problems as lack of electricity and receivers, especially in rural areas.

As with federally funded school projects in this country, funding sources too often dictate terms of grants without understanding local needs and problems. Recipients too often chase external funding without fully understanding how to use it. Problems with short-term consultants brought to Liberia by the funding source are worthy of another paper, as is the failure of funding agency officials to go into the countryside and observe first-hand many logistical and other problems.

(NOTE: This paper was based on direct observations by the author in 1987 and 1988, when he served as an educational planning specialist and communications consultant while a Peace Corps Volunteer assigned to the Ministry of Education, Republic of Liberia. He was stationed in the nation's capital, Monrovia, and provided technical assistance to the Media Unit of the Ministry, which was responsible for developing the radio programs described in this paper.)